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FR. ALBERIONE: A MYSTIC AT THE PASSING OF TIME... OF THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION. From "organization" to "greater perfection" (cf. AD 23-24)

SUMMARY – This short presentation on *Alberione as a mystic* is divided into three parts. The first part deals with mysticism in general, beginning with the history of mysticism, which will introduce the participant to the theme. The second part of the presentation aims at understanding how Fr. Alberione has understood mysticism. In line with the teachings of the great mystics and writers on mysticism Fr. Alberione too defines mysticism as a science of union with God. In the third part, taking into consideration the essential elements of mysticism, we try to see those elements in the life of Fr. Alberione, and thus to affirm that he can be called a true mystic of our times. The conclusion aims at indicating the lively exhortation of Fr. Alberione regarding the call of every Pauline to mysticism.

Part 1: MYSTICISM

1. Introduction

Whoever wants to speak of mysticism will face the *ambiguity* of the word and the *confusion* of defining it. The ambiguity of the concept is evident not only in the ordinary speech but also in the scholarly works. Noticing the differences in the definitions and opinions regarding mysticism, critics do not hesitate to affirm that mysticism “is the most ill-defined and fluid concept in all theology.”¹ There isn’t, perhaps, any other subject in the field of religious studies which is subjected to a variety of descriptions and definitions. Noticing the peculiar condition of mysticism, one of the authors stated, “The divergence of views is such that one is led to wonder whether all those who speak of mysticism can be speaking of the same thing.”² Even today, a discourse on mystics and mysticism seems to be very generic and undetermined.

It is not very difficult to find reasons for the current ambiguous and confused state of the study of mysticism. One of the reasons is the negative value labelled on mystics and mysticism, especially by scientists and by scholars of certain sections of psychology. They tend to associate mysticism with abnormal phenomena, pathological states and religious sentimentality. Still others associate mysticism with occult, magic, witchcraft, etc. The second reason is the abstract nature of the subject; mysticism is often associated with irrationalism, speculation, otherworldliness, etc. which has nothing to do with practical daily living. A third reason for the ambiguity of mysticism is

¹ A. WIKENHAUSER, *Pauline mysticism: Christ in the mystical teaching of St. Paul*, Freiburg 1960, 13.

² L. BOUYER, “Mysticism: An essay on the history of the word” in Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding mysticism: Its meaning, its methodology, interpretation in world religions, psychological evaluations, philosophical and theological appraisals*, New York 1980, 42.

that this phenomenon is often reduced to an exceptional level beyond the reach of ordinary people. Fourthly, the charges that mystic experiences are merely for personal satisfaction, and the inability to communicate the special experiences with others in a sensible way make mysticism unpopular and uninteresting. And finally, mysticism concerns the nature of our access to God, reality, truth, etc., and hence it is subjective and prone to controversy and interpretations.³ These confusions regarding the nature of mysticism have led to prejudice and the consequent lack of interest in investigation and scientific study. However, a new awakening has been taking place in the last two centuries with regard to the study of mysticism.

The growing interest in the field of mysticism is reflected in a new vocabulary to delineate specific aspects of this phenomenon: *mystology* – speaking about mysticism; *mystography* – writing about mysticism; *mystogogy* <sic> –introduction to the mystical experience; *Mystical way* –*the experience of mysticism in daily life*; *mystical theology* – the systematic reflection upon the direct experience of the Ultimate; and *mystical cosmology* – a view of the universe in which all things are seen to be interconnected.⁴

2. Brief history of mysticism

Mysticism in the Hellenistic religions: Historically the word is associated with Hellenistic mystery religions and cults of the pre-Christian era. The word *mysticism* comes down to us from the Greeks and it comes from the root meaning *to close*. The mystics were the ones who were initiated into the knowledge of the sacred rites of the mystery religions, and were required to keep secret of the rituals into which they were initiated. The word *mystical*, therefore, originally referred to the cultic secrets revealed only to the initiated—the mystics. The mystical secret was usually only a secret about the purely material aspects of the rites and rituals of the Greek mystery religions. *To close* also means to close the eyes to the external reality. Closing of self from everything external helps a person to enter deeply into one's self and it allows that person to obtain a knowledge which goes beyond human reason and to receive divine illuminations.

Mysticism in the Bible: Though the word *mysticism* is not found in the Bible, yet the concept is very much present therein. The sacred writers of the Scriptures grasped the mystical dimension of history: Adam and Eve experienced the intimate presence of God; Abraham, Jacob, Moses were often ecstatically drawn to God as their greatest good. Both Moses and Jacob claimed to have encountered God face to face (Gn 32: 30; Ex 33:11,23); The Old Testaments prophets were essentially mystics in action. Their experience of God transformed them and sensitised them to what God has done for them in the past and to what God does in the present. On the basis of their mystical experience of God, they could comprehend the situation well and address the situation effectively.

In the New Testament, Jesus realises the fullness of contemplation and transforms himself into the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15; 2:9). Jesus is the foundation of Christian mysticism. He claimed that no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:27). Jesus spoke of his intimate, total, personal knowledge of his Father (cf. Jn 7:29; 8:55). He knew that he came from the Father (cf. Jn 5:23). Jesus heard his Father (Jn 8:26), he knew his will (cf. Jn 5:30), and had seen him (cf. Jn 5:19). So intimate was his union with the Father that he revealed everything to the Son (cf. Jn 5:20). As expression of the Father's unconditional love for humanity, Jesus is the visible sign of what it means to be totally united with the God of love.

Philo of Alexandria: For the great Jewish thinker on religion, Philo of Alexandria, *mystical* did not refer to the secrets of rituals and cults, but to the hidden meaning of the Word of God. This understanding, probably, made him a bridge between the Greek Jewish worlds. Prompted by this

³ Cf. E. HOWELLS, “Mysticism and the mystical. The current debate”, in *Way Supplement*, Vol. 10, 2001, 15-27, 15.

⁴ C. KOURIE, “Mysticism: A way of unknowing” in *Journal of Dharma*, 35, 2 (July-September 2010), 218. <mystagogy> [nota del redattore]

consideration of Philo of Alexandria, the later Church Fathers spoke about the hidden or allegorical interpretation and meaning of the Word of God. And “by the time of Constantine, the word *mystical* had biblical, liturgical, and sacramental connotations and often denoted the hidden presence of Christ in the scriptures, the liturgy, and the sacraments,”⁵ especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The early Church Fathers like St Augustine and St Gregory used *contemplation* instead of *mysticism*.

Christian mysticism: The term *mysticism* came into Christian vocabulary more predominantly and systematically through the famous late fifth/sixth-century Syrian monk, Pseudo-Dionysius,⁶ who wrote the mystical classic *Mystica Theologia*. For him, mysticism involved the secrecy of the mind or that trans-conceptual state of consciousness which experiences God as a ray of divine Darkness.⁷

In the Latin Church, the word *mysticism* was not used so frequently until the late Middle ages. The 12th and the 13th centuries witnessed some great mystics: Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153), Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), Bonaventure (1221 – 1274), etc. The Christian contemplation reached to a higher level in the two great mystics: Teresa of Avila (+1582) and John of the Cross (+1591). Their works constitute a rich teaching of high mystical experiences. The way of intimacy with God is indicated and exposed with great clarity and surety in their works. It is to be noted that the Christian tradition has never reduced mysticism to mere psychology, nor has it deviated from associating it with its liturgical, sacramental and biblical basis.

2.1: Some important mystics in the history of the Church

a. Paul as a mystic

Paul's union with Christ: The phrase *in Christ* in Paul's letters describes clearly the intimate relationship he has with the risen Christ. To be *in Christ* indicates that the believer is under the power and influence of Christ. This union with Christ is total, i.e., union with Jesus in life, passion, death and resurrection. So completely was Paul transformed into Christ that he could claim: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Revelation of Jesus: As a mystic, Paul claims the revelation of Jesus to him (cf. Gal 1:12). The letters of Paul give expression to this claim: “But when God who has chosen me from my mother’s womb and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me” (Gal 1:15-16). Paul considers the appearance of the Lord on the way to Damascus as an authentic revelation of the Lord.

Special knowledge of Paul: Paul, more than anything else, is the revealer of divine wisdom. This is an intellectual illumination which puts Paul in contact with the mystery of being. God mystically illumined Paul and filled him with all the riches of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery in Christ (cf. Col 2:2-4). In fact, it is not enough to have a *vision* or *apparition* to enter into a relationship with the Risen Lord and to know him. This is evident from the apparitions of Jesus after his resurrection. The episodes of Emmaus, the first appearance to Mary Magdalene and the manifestation of Jesus at the lake reveal that a simple apparition or a physical vision is not sufficient for the knowledge and the identification with Jesus, but a superior illumination is necessary. When Paul speaks about the revelation which the Father gives him, he refers to this profound knowledge.

⁵ H.D. EGAN, *Christian mysticism. The future of a tradition*, Pueblo publishing company 1984, 2.

⁶ The importance of Dionysius is in the fact that he was the first, and for a while, the only Christian author who attempted to describe with penetration and accuracy the development of the mystical conscience. He carried out this work so well that the mystics of the later period, reading the writings of Dionysius, could find at least partial explanations to their marvellous experiences. And in describing their experience, they adopted the terms and metaphors of Dionysius (The paradoxical terms like “divine darkness”, “negation of all that is” and the idea of reaching the Absolute from the part of an individual, etc.) which then became classical terms in mystical theology. Cf. E. ANCILLI, “La mistica. Alla ricerca di una definizione” in E. ANCILLI, M. PAPAROZZI, ed., *La mistica. Fenomenologia e riflessione teologica*, Città Nuova 1984, 23.

⁷ Cf. H.D. EGAN, *What are they saying about mysticism?* New York 1982, 2.

Experiences and visions: Paul saw the risen Lord because “last of all he appeared to me also, as to the one abnormally born” (1Cor 15:8; 1Cor 9:1). And in the second letter to Corinthians Paul claims, “More than fourteen years ago, he was in ecstasy, and was caught up into the third heaven and saw things unutterable” (2Cor 12:2).

Mystical ideas in Paul

One of the mystical ideas of Paul is that the individual Christian should experience personally the redemptive process of Christ, i.e., the victory over sin and death of Jesus must be won *in* us too.

The phrase «in Christ» is a summary of Pauline mysticism, initiated by his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:12-18; Gal 1:12). Paul uses the phrase *in Christ* to express the closest conceivable union between the believer and Christ.

Paul’s mystical idea cannot be divorced from his emphasis on the ethical dimension. Believers are now free and their freedom is «in the spirit» (Rom 8:1-2); The moral imperative of the new life is directly opposed to ego-inflation, and on the contrary, emphasises conformity with Christ. Abandoning the desires of the empirical ego, the believer is transformed into the image of Christ.

b. Francis of Assisi and mysticism

Spirit of prayer: St Francis, rising to the heights of prayer experienced excited mystical experience. Caught up in such sweet experience of contemplation, he could not express what he experienced because it went beyond all human understanding.

New way of life: In his mystical union with Jesus, Francis felt the need for a new way of life of solidarity with all. This solidarity led Francis to kiss the wounds of a leper, to identify himself with the poor and to make friends with people of other religions.

Contemplation of God in nature: St Francis is considered to be an innovator in nature mysticism. He contemplated God as reflected in the material world. For him the whole material world was a mirror that reflected God.

The mysticism of Francis

For almost the first nine hundred years, Christian hermits and monks separated themselves from the lives and works of their fellow human beings outside. On the contrary, Francis maintained a positive attitude to the world. In encountering Jesus Christ, he discovered that Christian mysticism includes dynamic, purposeful action. Francis instead of leaving Assisi stayed there itself. He did so for the sake of human solidarity, to be with every human being.

St Francis’ mysticism is a mysticism of everyday life, i.e., everyone is called to walk in the presence of God on every occasion in life. This ordinary mysticism is within the reach of all people. In Francis’ view real mysticism reveals itself in the midst of activity; it remains the permanent source of dynamism. For him, the encounter with the lepers, the laborious work, the fraternal community living, the solidarity with the poor, etc., are occasions for mysticism. Hence, he advocates that contemplating the creation, one can enter into a state of mystical transcendence.

The mysticism of Francis is a mysticism of union. He prayed not so much for the grace to pray, but for the grace to become himself a prayer.

c. Teresa of Avila

In the history of spirituality, St Teresa of Avila is recognized as one of the greatest figures of Christian mysticism. Experience and doctrine are equally intermingled in her. For the fame of sanctity and for the depth of knowledge, she has become the first woman Doctor of the Church.

Manifestations: St Teresa of Avila had an extraordinary mystical life. She experienced ecstasies, raptures, wounds of love, a vision of her place in hell, visions of Christ’s humanity, and the like. Though she had frequent visions, they were not experiences that she sought. She even suspected some of them to be genuine.

Supernatural knowledge: Teresa lacked a formal education. In spite of this she was infused with eminent learning. During her prayers, she received the grace to understand and to express various aspects of her inner life.

Life of service: In Teresa, the mystical experiences and a fruitful life of service are two sides of the same coin. Intense work characterised her life. She established many convents for her nuns and helped the fathers to put up monasteries. She was a prolific writer. She was also an efficient administrator.

Serenity and restlessness: The mystical experience bestowed on her profound peace and at the same time restlessness. "Despite the extraordinary calm in her soul's core, Teresa likewise experienced a great pain from her inability to love enough and her realization that she could not do more."⁸

Mysticism in the writings of St Teresa of Avila

Joy in suffering: St Teresa says that one of the fruits of the Spiritual Marriage, the highest possible stage of mystical contemplation attainable here below is the delight in persecutions. She writes: "When these souls are persecuted again, they have a great interior joy, and much more peace than in the state described above. They bear no enmity to those who ill-treat them, or desire to do so. Indeed they conceive a special love for them, so that, if they see them in some trouble, they are deeply grieved and would do anything possible to relieve them."⁹

Spirit of service: Another sign of Teresian mysticism is *good works*. The life of contemplation naturally tends to action, service. St Teresa affirms that God reveals his indwelling presence not mainly through visions and voices, but by prompting virtuous actions in us. Teresa would say: "Contemplation is not simply a pious occupation in the chapel or in some other solitude. Its effects are necessarily seen in all the prosaic details of daily life that if growth in the virtues is lacking, so is the contemplation."¹⁰

Willingness to forgive: St Teresa would say that one of the criteria to judge the authenticity of mysticism is the readiness to forgive.

3. Definitions

3.1: What mysticism is not

Not occultism: First of all, mysticism has nothing to do with occultism which is normally associated with miracles, magical powers, mesmerism, witchcraft, palmistry, etc. Of course, mysticism does not rule out the possibilities of the possession of certain supernatural powers, but these powers are not essential conditions of mysticism and one should not long for these signs as they would deflect the mystic from his supreme objective — God.

Extraordinary features: Although certain extraordinary features like ecstasy, visions, trance, etc. may accompany the mystical state, they are not to be seen as essential elements of mysticism. It is a mistake to identify mysticism with certain miraculous and extraordinary psychosomatic features. Hence, it is necessary not to reduce mysticism to moments of trance, peak experience and rapture.

Not identical with spirituality: Mysticism cannot be identified or equated with spirituality. Though they are closely related, spirituality has a broader meaning than mysticism. Besides, though the practices of piety can assist a person to arrive at mystic union with God, it is also incorrect to dilute mysticism to certain practices of piety.

Not identical with religion: Mysticism is not identified with a religion, but rather as one of the most vital elements in all true religions.

3.2: Mysticism

⁸ H. D. EGAN, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, Minnesota 1996, 442.

⁹ *Interior Castle* VII, 3.

¹⁰ *Interior Castle* VII, 4.

Authentic union with God: Evelyn Underhill, one of the best writers of recent years on mysticism, says, “Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute.”¹¹ There are other writers who define mysticism in a similar fashion: “Mysticism means communion with God, that is to say with a being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality.”¹² An Indian author defines mysticism as “direct union with the divine Reality.”¹³ Mysticism can also be defined as “the immediate feeling of the unity of self with God.”¹⁴ The *Upaniṣads* of India seem to describe mysticism in the same terminology of union with God. For example, when the *Upaniṣads* explain Brahman as “not this nor that”, or when they affirm that Atman, i.e., individual person coincides with Brahman, the Absolute God, the allusion is made to the perfect union of individual person with the Absolute.

Experience of God: Mysticism is also defined as a way of life and as an experience of God. It is a way of life, “in which the purifying, illuminating and transforming power of God is experienced, effecting a transmutation of consciousness.”¹⁵ It is as an attitude of mind and an innate tendency of the human soul which seeks to transcend reason and to attain a direct experience of God. Mysticism can also be defined as an experience of God provoked in the individual by a special motion of the Holy Spirit.

4. Essential Elements of Christian Mysticism

We now attempt to enlist the essential elements of Christian mysticism. These essential elements will help us to indicate the characteristics of a mystic. These reflections will ultimately facilitate our effort to present Bl. James Alberione as a mystic and to speak about mysticism in him.

4.1: God as the Source of Everything

One of the essential elements of Christian mysticism is the conviction that in one way or another, everything is interconnected and that all things have a common origin — God¹⁶. The mystics, through every age, have been asserting that God is the Origin of everything and that all people in the depth of their being have a share in the Divine life. A mystic is also convinced that God is the source of human happiness and all that he/she wants and needs is God alone. Hence, a true mystic seeks only God. The desire for God prompts the mystic to reorganize or even destroy other lesser desires.

4.2: Experience of the Presence of God

The mystical experience is a human experience in which the individual perceives the direct intervention of God in his/her spiritual life. This experience is not an ordinary or commonplace experience, rather “a heightened awareness of God’s immediate and transforming presence.”¹⁷

The experience of the presence of God, i.e., the mystical experience, is marked with fluctuations of intensity. These experiences vary widely and they need not be constant and for a long period of time.

Our attempts to understand the mystical experiences with the help of our intellect may end up in failure because our mental structure can comprehend adequately only the empirical concepts. Now the fact that the mystical experiences are beyond human understanding does not mean that

¹¹ E. UNDERHILL, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, London 1923, 86.

¹² W. IGNE, *Mysticism in Religion*, London 1947, 8.

¹³ K.P.S. CHOUDHARY, *Modern Indian Mysticism*, Patna 1981, 12.

¹⁴ M. SMITH, “The nature and meaning of mysticism” in Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding Mysticism: Its Meaning, its Methodology, Interpretation in World Religions, Psychological Evaluations, Philosophical and Theological Appraisals*, New York 1980, 20.

¹⁵ C. KOURIE, “Mysticism: A way of Unknowing...”, 218.

¹⁶ BORCHERT, *Mysticism: Its History and Challenge*, Maine, 1994, 3.

¹⁷ MCGINN, “Mysticism” in SHELDRAKE, ed., *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London: SCM Press 2005, 19.

they are unreasonable. When we say that this experience is beyond reason we intend to say that it is outside the scope of logic and outside the sphere of conceptual understanding.

A mystic has the absolute certainty that God is present, and claims to have incontrovertible, subjective evidence of this presence, especially through his/her personal life. This experience is personal, passive and also active. To reduce it to mere passivity or activity would mean to diminish its genuine sense. In mystical experience there is a passive passivity when the person who had the experience limits himself/herself to bear its consequence. There is also a active passivity or receptivity when the person welcomes and makes his own the external influences and makes himself open to the world, to others and to God.

4.3: Union with God

The element that is emphasized most in mysticism is one's union with God. Mystical experience is the loving and mysterious union of a person with God. This union is a supernatural union of oneness with God, i.e., union of human faculties with those of God. In this context, Underhill describes mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order."¹⁸ In fact, the experience of God who is Holy demands that the one who experiences be like what is experienced, i.e., having experienced God who is Holy, the person wants to become Holy.

The aim of a mystic, therefore, is to be transformed into the likeness of Him in whose image he is created. The mystics seek to pass out of all that is merely phenomenal, out of all lower forms of reality, to become Being itself¹⁹. The mystics, by entering into a personal union with God who is the Source of being, feel the presence of God in all creation. And the mystics of all time would assert that at the end of all, the mystical life, i.e., a life of union with God is the life that a person ought to live.

4.4: Association with Grace

The mystical life means the progressive extension of the Spirit in the life of an individual. The experience of God and the union of a person with God are provoked in the individual by a special motion of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the recent writers intend mysticism as a spiritual life in which the influence of the gifts of the Spirit dominates. There cannot be any authentic experience of the profoundness of God which is in the level of nature, nor is it possible only by one's own force. We cannot be in the world of God if we are not brought there by the love and mercy of God. God's presence cannot be produced by imagination, memory and intellect, but it transcends all faculties. Although one can dispose oneself to receive it, one cannot produce it by one's own strength. Hence, mysticism is God's special gift to the mystics. And God's special gift comes to an individual, at times, in a way not heard of or at a time when one does not expect.

4.5: Transformation of Self and of the World

Mysticism consists of both an experience of God and the consequent transformation of the mystic. In fact, this transformation comes about through one's experience of God and through one's union with God.

The mystics, having surrendered themselves to God, become a powerful force in transforming the world. They are more attentive to the external world than others are. They now become more and more open to the world and its problems. And "because of the creative cast of their minds, they are able to weave up the crude received material into a living whole, into an idea or image which can be communicated to other men."²⁰ A mystic becomes "someone with vast aesthetic abilities."²¹

¹⁸ E. UNDERHILL, *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature...*, xiv.

¹⁹ M. SMITH, "The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism...", 20.

²⁰ E. UNDERHILL, "The mystic as creative artist" in Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding Mysticism: Its Meaning, its Methodology, Interpretation in World Religions, Psychological Evaluations, Philosophical and Theological Appraisals*, New York 1980, 402.

He thus becomes “a creative artist of the highest kind; and only when he is such an artist, does he fulfil the duty to the race.”²²

4.6: Love as the Genuine Mark of Mysticism

The transformation of self and the world can be summarized in the word *love*. The mystical experience is an expression of God’s love. The experience of the love of God transforms the mystic, and the essential sign of genuine transformation is love for God and for others. Hence, one can speak of mysticism only in the contest of love. In fact, what differentiates mysticism from other experiences is love. Touched by God, he/she has to pass on the experience received; must become mediators between God and people. A mystic is not individualistic, rather seeks to transcend the limitations of an individual and surrender himself to the ultimate Reality. He looks for no personal gain, nor does he try to satisfy the transcendental curiosity, but is moved by an instinct of love. A genuine mystic has no desire to gain the world, but aims at giving, surrendering and letting go. The genuine mystic proves the Gospel saying that only he who loses his life gains it.

4.7: Certain Mystical Signs—Ecstasies and Visions

Our description on mysticism would be incomplete without indicating certain signs of mysticism. Genuine mystical experiences manifest certain psychosomatic effects. It can result in partial or total ecstasy. One can receive extraordinary phenomena in his / her body like stigmata. Others may hear voices. Still others can receive divine manifestations and visions.

But mystics affirm that visions, ecstasy and voices are not essential part of mystical experience. Besides, excessive emphasis on these external factors would mislead people to confuse and to identify genuine mysticism with certain external manifestations which are not in line with true mysticism. Hence, no one should make efforts to induce himself into these external manifestations; no one should long for these signs and those who have them should not take pride in them. In fact, St Teresa of Avila would say that the visions and signs which minister to our spiritual needs and which make us more humble and authentic are really genuine. At this juncture one can ask about the relevance, purpose, value and authenticity of these external manifestations (visions, ecstasies, etc.) in genuine mysticism. The answer would be found in the divine providence which acts in most unexpected and mysterious ways. God in his love manifests Himself the way He wishes. We can also assume that God in His goodness wants to reward or manifest Himself to mystics to strengthen them in their moments of struggle and doubts.

4.8: Effects or Fruits of Mysticism

One of the fruits or effects of mysticism is greater knowledge. The mystic has a greater and profound knowledge about the divine mysteries than the simple faithful. A mystic’s union with God brings about in him a special knowledge. This union which is at times described as «God-intoxication» makes the mystic to forget about self, and knows to be in possession of the highest truth. This union makes the knowledge a loving knowledge. He perceives the sense of the mystery, i.e., the infinite transcendence of God. The reason why the mystic has a more profound knowledge is that he has had a particular experience of God. The knowledge of God comes through the mediation of concepts. Another reason for which a mystic has a greater knowledge of God is that God Himself instils in the soul a special notion through which his will is intimately united with the will of God and his intellect is made capable of perceiving the ineffable presence of God. Here we perceive another notion of mysticism, i.e., it is an infused experience in which the individual is passive by the action of the Holy Spirit. The passiveness is an essential condition to experience Mystery because the Mystery in as far as it is a Mystery is «received», and it cannot but be «received». The knowledge received is often trans-conceptual, general, vague, obscure and confused.

²¹ H. D. EGAN, *Christian Mysticism...*, 1984, 9-10.

²² E. UNDERHILL, “The Mystic as Creative Artist” ..., 401.

Another dimension of knowledge is intuition. Mysticism claims that the soul can see and perceive, perhaps through intuition, the revelation and knowledge of God; it can perceive things hidden from reason; besides, mysticism affirms that the highest knowledge can be gained through spiritual sense of intuition.

Mystical experience is not alien to experience of joy and sorrow. Consolation and desolation are part of mystical life. God's presence is accompanied by sentiments of joy, happiness, peace, pain, misery, suffering, etc. God can make His presence felt in a way which is delightful and also painful.

Mysticism which is the union of the individual with God brings about a temporal disappearance of the individuality, with all its modes of acting, thinking and feeling.

4.9: Call to Mysticism

Mysticism is not reserved only for a spiritual elite, but to all; it is not reserved for the elite who have the extraordinary signs of visions, heavenly voice, and raptures. In fact, there isn't any soil where mysticism cannot grow and flourish. It is said that mysticism is the eternal cry of the human soul for rest; the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality; and so long as man is less than an angel and more than a beast, this cry will not for a moment fail to make itself heard. Christian mysticism assumes that human beings are partakers of Divine nature, i.e., we are created in the image and likeness of God. The divine spark is present in every creature. That divine spark seeks union with the Eternal Flame—God. Therefore, all of us are potential mystics. Mysticism reveals that it is the core of authentic religious experience and all are called to it because mysticism is union with God, and nothing less than this satisfies the human soul. This union with God brings about a richer form of life that transcends daily living.

Part 2: MYSTICISM IN THE THOUGHT OF FR. ALBERIONE

1. Definition and Meaning

Mysticism, according to Fr. Alberione, is that part of Sacred Theology which deals with one's union with God (cf. LSS n. 87). Mysticism is the spiritual science which, beginning with infused contemplation, guides the person towards spiritual matrimony (cf. UPS II, n. 54). Mystic experience is the most intimate union with God; the one who brings the person to this stage of union is the Holy Spirit (cf. APD 1963, n. 186). In the context of the Eucharistic celebration, Fr. Alberione affirms that the Doxology which is a very short prayer expresses the true nature of mysticism; this prayer of immense value summarizes the whole of ascetical and mystical theology; one who lives this prayer, i.e., one who enters into the thoughts and desires of God, and lives by these thoughts and desires is truly a mystic and will attain perfection (cf. APD 1963, n. 285, 482, 499).

Often, Fr. Alberione speaks of mysticism in the context of the grades of prayer. He follows the traditional understanding of the grades of prayer: (1) Vocal prayer; (2) Mental prayer or prayer of meditation; (3) Affective prayer; (4) Prayer of simplicity (cf. AAP 1961, n. 631); (5) Infused contemplation; (6) Prayer of solitude (cf. AAP 1965, n. 479); (7) Simple union; (8) Ecstatic union; (9) Transforming union or spiritual matrimony (cf. UPS II, n. 109; APD 1965, n. 628). Spiritual matrimony is equivalent to realizing the truth contained in the famous phrase of St Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" [Gal 2,20] (cf. UPS II, 109). This stage of life is also equivalent to the observance of the first commandment; if we observe the first commandment, then we are in the mystical life (cf. APD 1962, n. 255).

The first four grades of prayer belong to asceticism; human effort is more stressed in asceticism (cf. APD 1965, n. 628). The other five grades, which come under mysticism, are mainly the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. APD 1965, n. 628, 462; AAP 1965, n. 463). One arrives at the transforming union with the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. APD 1965, n. 241, 462). Emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit, Fr. Alberione would point out that mystic experience is never a human

merit; it is always a gift of God. The experience is something more profound than what people see and think. The experience is so profound that the ability to write about it itself is a gift of God (cf. FSP 1929-1933**, p. 46).

Mysticism which is a union with God, at times, brings about extraordinary phenomena such as visions, apparitions, revelations, miracles, etc., in the life of a mystic, but the extraordinary phenomena are not essential part of mysticism (cf. UPS II, n. 109; AAP 1961, n. 628; APD 1960, n. 240). Hence our Founder would say: that which makes us saints is not extraordinary mystical experiences but ordinary asceticism and mysticism (cf. AAP 1961, n. 629).

It is a sublime and difficult science which only few understand and practise (cf. LSS n. 87). One cannot understand it only with human reason (cf. LSS n. 90). For its divine origin and substance, Fr. Alberione considers mysticism superior to other human sciences (cf. LSS n. 90).

The foundation and principles of mysticism are sure and clear because it has its base in the Scripture and in the tradition (cf. LSS n. 87-89). Mysticism is not something abstract or uncertain, but a true and certain science, and its certainty comes from the Holy Bible written under divine inspiration (cf. LSS n. 89). The extraordinary phenomena in the lives of the saints such as ecstasy, apparitions, stigmata, transfigurations, bi-location, etc., are material objects for mysticism (cf. LSS n. 87).

The scope of mysticism is to instruct and guide the person to greater perfection till the last grade of mystical experience which is spiritual matrimony of the soul with Jesus the lover (cf. LSS n. 87-89). According to Fr. Alberione the goal of human being is: “the whole person in Jesus Christ, in view of loving God completely [by means of one's] intelligence, will, heart and physical strength. Nature, grace and vocation: everything [is] for the apostolate” (AD n. 100). The goal of human being is to be completely united with Jesus, i.e., a complete transformation of the I of I into the I of Jesus; it is a total transformation of the total persona into the total Jesus; it is the transformation of all faculties to live in Christ. A Christified person lives in the flesh, but it is Christ who thinks, acts and loves in and through that person (cf. FSP-SdC, n. 97; APD 1967-68, n.71; FSP46-49, p. 598; APD 1963, n. 249; AAP 1957, n. 11).

2. Scripture and Mysticism

According to Fr. Alberione, certain books of the Bible, especially the books of the Prophets and the Song of Songs which describe the spiritual union and the intimate dialogue of the soul with the Lord are mystical in their nature. The Song of Songs is called the *Song of Mystics*; this book deals with the intimate relationship between the lover soul with the heavenly spouse (cf. LSS n. 89). This book, in the words of our Founder, is preferred by Mother Mary and St Paul (cf. LSS n. 89). The Psalms and the Prophets contain sublime prayers; they are prayers which take the soul to God and make possible intimate communication with the Holy Trinity (cf. LSS n. 89).

St Paul, the great doctor of mystical theology has not only left the writings on Mystical Theology, but has given us examples from his life (cf. LSS 89; FSP 1929-1933**, p. 46). All the grades of mysticism in their highest form are found in the doctrine of St Paul (cf. FSP 1934-39, p. 624). Fr. Alberione would say that the other books on mysticism are in line with the doctrine of St Paul (cf. APD 1966, n. 330).

3. Mystics in the Mind of the Founder

Mary, according to Fr. Alberione, is the greatest mystic; she had intimate communications with God and had more mystic gifts than all the saints put together (cf. BM. n. 150).

The prayer of Paul was the most elevated prayer which a person can attain (cf. FSP 1934-39, p. 624). The mystical life of Paul is expressed more eloquently in his words: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” [Gal 2:20] and in “for me to live is Christ” [Phil 1:21] (cf. FSP 1934-39, p. 625).

Fr. Alberione indicates that St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross have reached the highest form of mysticism and piety (cf. BP 1948, 129). In St John of the Cross are united

mortification and knowledge of the divine sciences (cf. FSP 1950-1953, 527). Having reached the highest form of mysticism, St John of the Cross is the Protector of those who study this Sacred Science (cf. FSP 1950-1953, 527).

Fr. Alberione puts among the mystics Bl. Timothy Giaccardo, Ven. Canon Chiesa, and Ven. Tecla Merlo.²³ He asks: “I don't know if there is anyone who has seen Canon Chiesa praying. After a few minutes of prayer, he is already fully absorbed: an infused silence till an ecstatic and transforming union.”²⁴

4. Books Recommended

The Gospels are the first books of asceticism and mysticism (cf. APD 1963, n. 501). After the Gospels, the letters of St Paul are the greatest books on these themes (cf. APD 1965, n. 628). Fr. Alberione would say that other books which speak about mysticism took their material from St Paul (cf. APD 1966, n. 330). The *Constitutions*, of course always second to the Scriptures, is another book of asceticism and mysticism (cf. APD 1963, n. 501). Added to this list, the two important books recommended by Fr. Alberione are: *A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* of Adolf Tanquerey and *Theology of Christian Perfection* of Royo Marin Antonio (cf. APD 1960, n. 273).

The call to mysticism is universal. All the religious are called to mysticism and have the grace to arrive at spiritual matrimony which is expressed in “Christ lives in me” [Gal 2,20] (cf. UPS II, 54). Everyone has the vocation and grace to reach up to the last stage of spiritual matrimony (cf. UPS II, n. 109). One is to progress in knowing and living always better the two parts of Theology: asceticism and mysticism (cf. UPS II, n. 54). One has to move from asceticism to mysticism (cf. AAP 1965, n. 241). Fr. Alberione would say that the faithful do well in praying for mystic gifts which do not mean always the gifts of miracles and prophesies (cf. BP 1956, p. 137-138). If someone does not reach up to this stage, the fault is one's own (cf. APD 1963, n. 186).

Part 3: FR. ALBERIONE AS A MYSTIC

We have already seen that mystical experiences are beyond human understanding for its divine origin and operation. On account of this nature of mysticism, we cannot categorically affirm and scientifically prove Fr. Alberione as a mystic. But considering the characteristics of Christian mysticism and associating them with the life and activities of Fr. Alberione, we can make an attempt to show the mystical elements in his life and activities.

1. God as the Source of Everything

One of the essential elements of Christian mysticism, as we have indicated earlier, is the belief in the common source of everything and in the connectedness of everything in the world. The common source which connects everything is God. The belief in God as the source of everything and a life of absolute dependence on God make Fr. Alberione a mystic of our times.

God as source of everything: One of the firm beliefs that characterized the life of Fr. Alberione is the conviction that God is the source of everything. Fr. Alberione believed and taught that God is the only necessary Being (cf. DF n. 17), that He is the Creator of everything (cf. FSP 1929-1933* p. 485), that He is the Supreme Father (UPS II, n. 13) and that the plan of God is “glory of God and peace of human beings” (UPS II, n. 152). As Creator of everything, the world is the projection of God, i.e., everything receives its life, energy, order, unity, beauty and intelligence from God (UPS II, n. 151; AE n. 147; FSP 1929-1933* p. 476).

Dependence on God: Creatures do not have existence independent of the Creator (cf. Jn 15:5). One of the aspects which greatly qualified the life and the activities of Fr. Alberione is his absolute

²³ G. ALBERIONE, *Esercizi spirituali. Prediche tenute alle Maestre* [s.l.], 1966, p. 34-35.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

dependence on God. Hence he would say: “With God everything, without God nothing” (AAP 1961, n. 345). We can find instances for this lively faith of Alberione in God. One of the instances that we can recall to our mind is the construction of the Temple of St Paul at Alba. He started it relying completely upon the providence of God. Another instance is narrated by Fr. Alberione himself: When he was a secular priest, he had a purse with him. When he became a religious and a Founder, when he needed more money, he gave up his purse and told the Lord, “Send all that is necessary” (VCG [MV] n.113). Fr. Alberione considered himself incapable of doing anything independent of God: “Before God and man, I feel the gravity of the mission entrusted to me by the Lord who, had he found a person more unworthy and unfit, would have preferred him. Nevertheless, for me and for everyone, this is the guarantee that the Lord has willed and has done everything himself” (UPS I, n. 374). Alberione’s prayer life is an important sign of his belief in the power of God. His concern was to ensure prayer before the start of every initiative; and this is the main teaching that he received from Canon Chiesa.²⁵

2. Experience of the presence of God

Mysticism is defined as an experience of God which brings about transformation of one's consciousness. In the experience of God, the individual perceives the direct intervention of God in his/her life. If God-experience and the consequent transformation of oneself is one of the criteria of mysticism, Fr. Alberione can be called a mystic.

Fr. Alberione’s life was marked by intense experience of God. He saw the hand of God in everything even in the events which seemed agonizing. Alberione was born weak and fragile. The physical fragility, apparently negative, gave a different orientation to his life, an orientation different from that of his father and brothers. Leaving definitively the seminary of Bra, apparently an agonising experience for Alberione, was a blessing in disguise because it helped him to find himself in a better seminary for its spirit, knowledge, sanctity of the directors.²⁶ Fr. Alberione was appointed director of the *Gazzetta d’Alba* in 1913. In this move of the Bishop which opened the door of press apostolate (cf. AD n. 30), Fr. Alberione saw the intervention of God.

The most important experience of God in the life of Alberione took place in the night that divided the 19th century from the 20th. To welcome the new century, Pope Leo XIII had decreed that the night between 1899-1900 and the night between 1900-1901, special midnight Mass and special adoration were to be organized in all the chapels where the Blessed Sacrament was habitually preserved. Following this exhortation of the Pope, the night between 1900-1901, the Midnight Mass was celebrated in the seminary of Alba and solemn adoration was organized. In the seminary of Alba, the seminarians were free to pray after the Midnight Mass. Young James continued to pray after the Midnight Mass. While praying:

A special light came from the Holy Host, and he had a greater understanding of Jesus' invitation *come to me all of you*; he seemed to have understood the heart of the Pope, the invitations of the Church, the mission of a true priest. What was said by the sociologist Toniolo about the duty to become apostles of today adopting the means misused by the enemies became clear in the mind of James. And he felt obliged to do something for the people of the new century with whom he would be living (AD n. 15).

That famous night was a Damascus experience for Fr. Alberione. He has idealised those four hours of night adoration and the consequent intervention of God in his life. There are many other instances when Fr. Alberione experienced the powerful intervention of God in his life: When he needed a serene maturation of an idea, the Lord gifted him brief periods of rest on bed (cf. AD 47); when he suffered from Tuberculosis and feared the danger of abandoning his activities halfway, he heard the voice of the Lord: “The Lord thinks and makes provision better than you; go ahead with faith” (AD n. 112); many times, especially at the times of need and difficulties, Fr. Alberione heard the voice: “I am with you till the end of the world” (AD n. 16, 156); while praying, he heard the

²⁵ Cf. L. ROLFO, *Don Alberione. Appunti per una biografia*, Alba 1974², p. 153.

²⁶ Cf. G. BARBERO, *Il sacerdote Giacomo Alberione. Un uomo – un’idea*, Roma 1991, p. 106.

voice of the Lord, “You can err, but I do not. Vocations come not from you but only from me: this is the external sign that I am with the Pauline Family” (AD n. 113); at other times, when “there were urgent and serious needs, and all the human resources and prospects were exhausted, we prayed and we sought to drive out all sin and every fault against poverty: and unexpected solutions, money arrived from unknown people, the offer of loans, new benefactors and other things that he never knew how to explain” (AD n. 166).

Fr. Luigi Rolfo narrates certain intense moments of God experience in the life of Fr. Alberione:²⁷ Sometimes, Fr. Alberione used to go to his room and would remain there the whole day without taking food and without responding to anyone who would knock at the door. They were the days, in his own words, when he was not working! At times, he used to remain closed in the room for many days without taking food. When it happened for the first time, everyone around him was afraid. Not knowing what to do, they went to Canon Chiesa, the unique person who had the authority to make Fr. Alberione listen. Canon Chiesa would come and make him to open the door and remain with him for a while. Coming out of the room, Canon Chiesa would pacify all and tell them that the Theologian was speaking with the Lord to know about the course of action he had to take in the future. Canon Chiesa had to come a few more times to do the same for the sake of the sisters who were panic-stricken, especially in the years 1928-1929.

3. Union with God

Mysticism is the science of union with God. A true mystic seeks to be united with God. The desire for God prompts the mystic to reorganize or even destroy other lesser desires. If union with God is one of the criteria to be called mystic, Fr. Alberione is a mystic.

Necessity of union with God: The attempt to be united with the Lord presupposes its necessity. The mystics are aware that life finds its true meaning only in God. St Paul, whom Fr. Alberione calls the *first mystic*, speaks about the necessity of our union with God in these words: “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom everything comes and to whom we go” (1Cor 8:6); “All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col 1:16); In Him there is fullness of life (cf. Col 1:19). It is this conviction that made St Augustine pronounce his famous words: “Our hearts are made for you Lord, and they are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Fr. Alberione too was convinced that human beings are created for God and only in God they can find happiness because in God, there is Truth which satisfies human search for truth; in God there is hope which overcomes every human despair; in God there is love, which overcomes every isolation and loneliness. Aware of this truth, Fr. Alberione says that our scope cannot be pleasure, appreciation, virtues, power, knowledge. They are finite. Our hearts search for what is infinite (BM n. 8). He believed and affirmed that human being is created for eternity (cf. UPS I, n. 15).

We cannot easily measure the degree of union of a person with the Lord. The only way to measure it is from the fruits as Jesus said: “You will recognise them by their fruits” (Mt 7,16). For the fruits of the Spirit that Fr. Alberione demonstrated in his life and for the fruits of good works that he carried out, cannot but be attributed to the intense union that he had with the Lord in prayer.

Supernatural atmosphere: One of the experiential signs of his union with the Lord is the supernatural atmosphere which he created around him. It is said that he created around him that supernatural atmosphere by which the youngsters stayed clued to him. Here is the witness of Rinaldo Angelo Cozzani (1907-1982): “The way in which he listened, advised, treated, left me the impression that, when I exited and climbed up the steps to go to rest, I felt like flying. I am telling the truth.”²⁸

Instilling enthusiasm: As a person who was united with the Lord, Fr. Alberione could instil enthusiasm in others. Here is one of the examples: Before leaving for Susa, the young Daughters

²⁷ Cf. L. ROLFO, *Don Alberione. Appunti...*, p. 184.

²⁸ M. FERRERO, ed., *Don Alberione che sorride. Aneddoti nella vita del Beato Giacomo Alberione*, Roma 2013, p. 50.

came together around Fr. Alberione who blessed them. According to Teresa Merlo, that benediction from Fr. Alberione gave them courage. In that moment, they wanted to fly to Susa to arrive there first. She, after many years confessed that the effect of that benediction continues.²⁹

Efficient preacher: Fr. Alberione was not a great orator, but an efficient orator. The basis of his efficacy was his life in union with God and a life of example. His words carried profound convictions.³⁰

4. Transformation of Self and the World

The experience of God and union with God bring about the transformation of the individual. We have already pointed out that mysticism consists of both God-experience and the consequent transformation of the mystic. If transformation of self and the attempts to transform the world can be one of the marks of a true mystic, Fr. Alberione is truly a mystic.

Transformation of self: As we have already pointed out, the Damascus experience of Alberione took place in the famous night that divided the two centuries. The most visible transformation of Alberione was that from that moment onwards he tried to understand society better; his readings were more focused, disciplined and directed towards a precise purpose (to serve the Church); he dedicated all of his free time for reading and study (AD n. 13-22). The immediate interior transformation was the desire or rather the obligation to do something for the people of the new century with whom he would live (cf. AD n. 15).

It is certainly the experience of God and union with Him that transformed a young man (Alberione) full of crisis into a Founder who became a marvel of our times. Some of the other interior transformations that took place in the life of Fr. Alberione are: greater faith in the providence of God; the conviction to have received a special and well determined mission in his life; sense of duty; attentiveness to the signs of the times; openness to the world and its problems; strict adherence to the doctrine of the Church; detachments from worldly things; larger vision in life; greater enthusiasm for mission; dispositions to make sacrifices; sense of sin; willingness to suffer, etc. Fr. Alberione's sole aim was to evangelize the whole world with the means of communication for which he was willing to give up his life.

Transformation of the world: God-experience cannot be devoid of an ethical dimension. The mystical experiences and a life of service always go together. So it happened in the life of Fr. Alberione who became a powerful instrument in transforming the world.

The most visible sign in favour of evangelizing the whole world is the foundation of the Pauline Family with its diversified activities. One cannot but admire Fr. Alberione for the number of initiatives he took for the work of evangelization: Distribution of Bibles; distribution of good literature through books, magazines, leaflets; the apostolate of radio, television and cinema; the liturgical and priestly apostolate; the pastoral work; the associations and unions he began in favour of the Church. While some of his initiatives have died, some of them still continue to inspire the people of today.

Man of action: All his spiritual sons and daughters will admit that Fr. Alberione was a man of action. The nature of Fr. Alberione was such that an activity or initiative was like an obsession till it was completed. At the moment of the finalizing of that initiative, he was practically absent, and was absorbed about new projects that were in his mind.

One cannot understand how he could manage the things that he had to do in a day: the governance of four congregations, delicate administration, correspondence, continuous visits, travels in Italy and abroad, etc.³¹ As spiritual guide and unique interpreter of the Pauline spirit, as animator of all the branches of the Pauline Family, he had to make many speeches – up to twelve times a day. He used to organize retreats and assign the preachers, but he used to ensure that a few discourses in every retreat is reserved for him.

²⁹ Cf. *Le Figlie di San Paolo*. Note per una storia 1915-1984, p. 105.

³⁰ L. ROLFO, *Don Alberione. Appunti...*, p. 378 (!)

³¹ Testimony of Fr. Renato Perino in *Mi Protendo in Avanti*, Alba 1954, 25.

As a man of immediate action, Fr. Alberione also expected immediate action from his disciples. After having ascertained the will of God, when the time was ripe, he would reveal his plan to the one who would be entrusted with that work. It was necessary to move from words to action immediately. Here is the testimony of Fr. Thomas Fogarty. When he came from Ireland for the extraordinary retreat at Ariccia, he spoke to Fr. Alberione about the situation in Ireland. He also spoke about some projects planned for the future like *Famiglia Cristiana*, *La Domenica*, etc. In a short conversation, Fr. Alberione repeated “do it”, at least five times in a tone of someone who was tired of hearing the ideas, but then no follow up.³²

5. Love as the Genuine Mark of Mysticism

Love is action: Mystical experience is an expression of God's love. The experience of God's love makes the mystic an agent of God's love. Hence, as we have already mentioned, love is the sign of genuine mysticism. Love as the only motive of action qualifies Fr. Alberione to be a mystic.

In this world of selfishness and individualism, the vast majority of people look for fame, money, power and pleasure. The competence, learning, enthusiasm and piety of Alberione would have brought him bigger titles than a mere “Father”. Fr. Alberione was conscious of that, but he worked not for worldly fame, but for the glory of God. For the enterprising and passionate nature of Fr. Alberione, he could have easily become materially rich. We do not have to think of an imaginary situation, but the reality of the Pauline Family with its various establishments are concrete signs of what he could have accomplished in the secular world. Fr. Alberione looked for money, rejoiced when he had it in abundance, but all for making advancements in the apostolate. As a priest and Founder, He had authority, an authority which came from his way of life, an authority which he used to do the work of God with faithfulness. Finally, Fr. Alberione took no pleasure in selfish thoughts and actions, but in seeing the initiatives carried out faithfully in spreading the Kingdom of God. In summary, the motive of action of Alberione was genuine love, and that makes him a mystic.

6. Presence of the Spirit

The mystical life means the progressive extension of the Spirit in the life of an individual by the presence of the gifts of the Spirit. If progressive extension of the Spirit in the life of a person is the hallmark of a mystic, then Fr. Alberione can be termed a mystic.

The fruits of the Spirit, according to Paul, are: charity, joy, peace, patience, understanding of others, kindness and fidelity, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Fr. Alberione's life was characterised by these fruits of the Spirit, and those who had the privilege to live with him would testify to it. The above paragraph on love and the hallmark of genuine mysticism reveals the *fruit of charity* in the life of Fr. Alberione. He rejoiced over his priestly vocation, over Pauline charism, over the Pauline method of Jesus Master, Way - Truth - Life. Though a man of perpetual physical suffering, he found joy in it and offered it to complete the suffering of Jesus in his life.

Fr. Alberione was very *understanding* of the difficulties and situations of others. As a Founder, he had many things to do. But he never assumed the attitude of not having time or of being very busy. All could approach him any time and even without prior appointment³³. After supper, Fr. Alberione used to retreat himself to the room to prepare himself for daily confession. After the sacrament of confession and night prayer, he would go to rest. But if he were to notice that there was someone who was waiting for him, he would welcome that person and listen to him.³⁴ In 1955 Fr. Alfonso Ferrero came to Rome from India. Fr. Alberione came to fetch him from the airport. They reached the house around midday, and Fr. Ferrero expressed his desire to celebrate Mass in the new Sanctuary of Mary Queen of Apostles. Fr. Alberione told him: “Don't be in a

³² T. FOGARTY, in *Don Alberione. Umanità e fascino* (Testimonianze), Società San Paolo 2006, 60.

³³ Testimonianza di Don Luigi Zanoni: in Antonio Ugenti (a cura di) *La sfida di Don Alberione* (Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1989).

³⁴ A. SPECIALE, in *Don Alberione. Umanità e fascino* (Testimonianze), Società San Paolo, 2006, p. 139.

hurry. I will make you a coffee now and then after a short rest, we will celebrate the Mass. I will come to serve you.”³⁵

Fr. Alberione produced the fruit of *fidelity*. He was obedient to the Roman Pontiff and was faithful to the doctrines of the Church. He said that the whole world is our parish, the parish of the Pope. So, everything has to be done according to the mind and will of the Pope who is the Supreme Authority of the religious. For this purpose alone, he committed the Pauline Family to the fourth vow of *fidelity to the Pope* regarding apostolate.

Regarding his *gentleness* towards others, especially the sick, here is a testimony. Fr. Giovanni Chiavarino (1900-1994) narrates his story: Fr. Alberione had come to Rome from Alba for a retreat. As soon as he came to the reception, he did not ask for the superior, but asked: “Is there anyone sick?” When knowing there was Chiavarino, he went and knocked at his door³⁶.

Fr. Alberione would treat persons well as he would treat Jesus. Here is another episode: one evening, Fr. Rosario Esposito was to give the benediction at the end of the Visit. He did it in a hurry and with movements not very edifying. Fr. Alberione felt very bad about it. After the Visit, Alberione came to him and told him: “Treat Jesus well; he in reality is a very good person”³⁷.

Fr. Alberione was *patient*, and as a person of patience he could change programmes without agitation. He could remain serene in every situation.

7. Certain Mystical Signs in the Life of Fr. Alberione

Knowledge: The mystical experience of God leads to special knowledge of Him. God mystically illumined Fr. Alberione and gave him a special knowledge of his mystery and of the mission that he had to carry out.

First, let us consider the knowledge that Fr. Alberione had of St Paul. He does not appear among the scholars of Paul. Neither did he do any special study on Paul. So, his knowledge is not scientific or exegetical. That does not mean that his knowledge is less valid and less true, but on the contrary. The knowledge of Fr. Alberione is a knowledge illumined by the inspiration of the Lord. There is connection between the mission and the grace to carry out the mission. The mission of Fr. Alberione was that of giving Jesus Master Way, Truth, Life to the world as he is lived and taught by Paul. In order to carry out this mission effectively, Fr. Alberione also received a special knowledge of Paul and his doctrines.

Intuitive knowledge: Fr Luigi Zanoni testifies to the fact that Fr. Alberione had the prophetic illumination which transcended human possibilities. He gives an example from his experience: Fr. Alberione was at Turin and Fr. Zanoni was in Rome. In the morning, Fr. Zanoni had a visitor who abused him terribly. And in the first hours in the afternoon, Fr. Alberione telephoned him to console him about what had happened in the morning. How did Fr. Alberione know about it? Fr. Zanoni himself gives the response: Fr. Alberione was gifted with supernatural light³⁸. It was the intuitive knowledge of Fr. Alberione which prompted him to unite “Master” with the “Way, Truth, Life” of the Pauline formula. It was the intuitive knowledge of Fr. Alberione that helped him to understand the state of the soul of the person who visited him (Testimony of Fr. Zanoni).

Fasting, prayer, strength: The most important thing about the long fasting of Alberione which would last even up to seven days, did not leave him weak and tired. After the fasting, when he started his normal rhythm of life, all found him as they used to see him³⁹.

Visions: As a child, Alberione had to show the *light* for his father and brothers who went to work before the dawn of the day. As a young man and as Founder he saw the *light* of the Lord at different occasions. In the famous night, Alberione witnessed a special *light* from the Holy Host (AD n. 15). It is in clear *light* that he took the definitive decision that the printers, technicians and

³⁵ M. FERRERO, *Don Alberione che sorride*, p. 92-93.

³⁶ G. CHIAVARINO, in *Don Alberione. Umanità e fascino* (Testimonianze), Società San Paolo 2006, p. 33

³⁷ M. FERRERO,, *Don Alberione che sorride*, p. 110.

³⁸ L. ZANONI, in A. UGENTI, ed., *La sfida di Don Alberione*.

³⁹ L. ROLFO, *Don Alberione. Appunti...*, 184. (English)

propagandists all be consecrated persons (AD n. 24). And then in a special *light*, Fr. Alberione heard the voice of the Lord: “Do not fear, I am with you. From here I want to enlighten. Be sorry for sins” (AD n. 152).

Humble, contrite heart: Like most mystics, Fr. Alberione too felt the need for severe penance which goes from “interior dispositions” to “external mortifications”. Fr. Alberione had the sense of sin. He did not want to offend God by not doing the will of God. Many years after the fire in the press in 1920, some of his disciples reminded Fr. Alberione that they found him serene the next day amidst the great loss. Fr. Alberione replied: “It is less grave than a venial sin.” He was convinced that the time spent for anything outside the “mission” entrusted by the Lord was a sin.

Creativity: Mystics become creative in their thoughts and actions. So was Fr. Alberione. Alberione noticed that the Bible was not read. The idea prevalent was that it was dangerous to give the Gospel to the people. Noticing that the Bible was not read habitually in the families, he organized Day of the Gospel in the parishes. Fr. Alberione's initial idea was to organize people for the good press. But creativity and inspiration led him to decide that this group should be a group of religious who would ensure unity, continuity, purity of doctrine and special efficacy. Before Fr. Alberione became librarian of the seminary, the library was not furnished well. He somehow managed to get money, and bought new books and new magazines. The innumerable activities of Fr. Alberione are signs of his creative mind. Added to it, the aesthetic sense of Fr. Alberione which led him to construct beautiful churches and houses, is not to be forgotten.

Conclusion

The mystic personality, in the thought of Fr. Alberione, is an integral personality. The mystical way of life makes demands on the whole person, and not merely certain human emotions and faculties. Mysticism aims at the growth and development of the wholeness of a person. The itinerary of this conformation of a person to Christ is narrated in the text, *Donec formetur Christus in vobis* (DF). It is a gradual process which leads a person to become docile to live and remain in Jesus; they become truly Christified. The Christified man and woman become true apostles. The Christified persons will continue to carry out their apostolate faithfully; they will be persons of the Church; they will be persons of faith, hope and charity.

Fr. Alberione is a mystic of everyday life. His mystic tendencies reveal themselves in the midst of apostolic activities. For him apostolic initiatives and dedicated work are occasions of true mysticism. Hence, let every opportunity that our daily life offers us be an occasion to become *mystics* to which God calls each human being.

Key to the abbreviations

AAP	<i>Don Giacomo Alberione alle Suore di Gesù Buon Pastore</i>
AD	<i>Abundantes divitiæ gratiæ suæ</i>
AE	<i>L'apostolato dell'edizione</i>
AP	<i>Alle Suore Apostoline</i>
APD	<i>Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro</i>
BM	<i>Brevi meditazioni per ogni giorno dell'anno</i>
BP	<i>Prediche alle Suore Pastorelle</i>
DF	<i>Donec formetur Christus in vobis</i>
FSP	<i>Figlie di San Paolo</i>

FSP-SdC	<i>Alle Figlie di San Paolo. Spiegazione delle Costituzioni</i>
LSS	<i>Leggete le SS. Scritture</i>
MS	<i>Meditazioni per consacrate secolari</i>
MV	<i>Mihi vivere Christus est</i>
UPS I-IV	<i>Ut perfectus sit homo Dei</i>
VCG	<i>Viviamo in Cristo Gesù</i>

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